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1955/05/04

4 May 1955

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MEMORANDUM FOR AMBASSADOR COLLINS

Subject: Cao Dai Problem, Political & Military

1. Major Hoai was Trinh Minh The's most trusted confidante. Hoai visited me this morning to explain The's political ideas and to let me know that Hoai will carry out these plans of The's as far as possible, then retire from the scene. He was quite broken up with grief.
2. Last night, General Phuong had been asked by Hoai to take command of The's troops in the current action south of the Canal de Derivation. This was done with the thought of getting Phuong actively committed to action, and to have him bring his own troops into action as well as The's. Col Cau, The's military deputy, is on his way from the Pleine des Jons to take over military command of the troops.
3. Pope Pham Cong Tac liked neither The nor Phuong, but was afraid of moving against them because the Cao Dai people loved The. It is now a distinct possibility that Tac will turn the Cao Dai command over to General Tat and rejoin the Unified Front. Pope Tac held a meeting at midnight last night at which it was decided to replace Phuong. Gen. The had been keeping Phuong in line with Diem, so now it will be up to Diem himself to bring Phuong closer to him.
4. Hoai felt that Diem's first step should be to give tangible evidence to Phuong's troops that they are really a part of the National Army, such as issuing them uniforms or some item of equipment. This would draw them away from the sectarian influence of Tac or Tat.
5. I had Lt Redick take Major Hoai in to see President Diem, who spoke to Hoai briefly, had him talk to General Ty for a few monats, then turned him over to brother Nhu (neither The nor Hoai have any real liking for Nhu). Nhu wanted to keep The's forces apart from Phuong and said the government would give Col Cau the same support they gave The. Hoai feels that Cau cannot really step into The's shoes and it would be a mistake to try to build him up individually, that it would be better to form a committee to decide policy and deal with Phuong.
6. Hoai feels that if Tac and Phuong break with each other, Phuong might go over to the Vietminh in a fit of pique.
7. The was killed about 1900 hrs 3 May close to the Nha Be bridge, lying prone out in front troops directing their fire against the six Binh Xuyen armored vedettes. His mother, wife, four kids are now in Saigon. The government will give them a "generous" pension, state burial for The as national hero, and highest military award.

copies to: General O'Daniel
Mr Kidder

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